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## Congress Pushes Completion of September 11<sup>th</sup> Bill

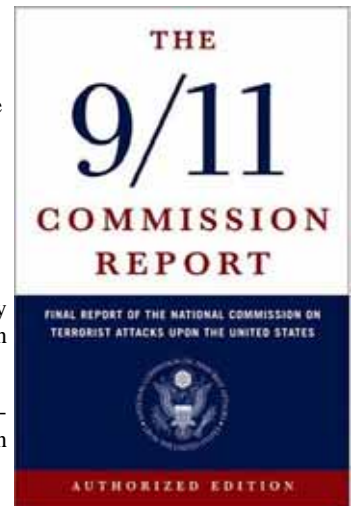
The House and Senate have appointed conferees for H.R. 1, "Implementing the Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act," with the hope of ironing out any differences before August.

Almost three years ago, the bipartisan 9/11 Commission submitted its 41 recommendations to Congress on how to better protect America from terrorism. In January, the recommendations were incorporated into H.R. 1 and approved by the House with strong bipartisan support by a vote of 299 to 128. The Senate passed its version (S. 4) of the bill by a vote of 60 to 38 in March.

The two bills are very similar. Both contain strong provisions needed to improve homeland security, prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and authorize strategies for curbing the appeal of extremism around the world. With a new report indicating that al Qaeda has "regenerated key elements" of its ability to attack our country and has a new effort to put agents inside the United States, this legislation is critical.

Some of the key provisions in the House-passed bill:

- Improves the explosive screening of checked baggage at airports by requiring the rapid installation of the latest in-line explosive detection systems at airports
- Expands the screening of cargo on passenger aircraft by establishing a system for phasing in the inspection of 100% of cargo carried on passenger aircraft over the next three years
- Cracks down on the transfer of nuclear technology by requiring the President to impose sanctions on any person who trades nuclear enrichment technology to a non-nuclear weapons state
- Enhances communications interoperability for first responders by establishing a stand-alone communications interoperability grant program



- Strengthens efforts to prevent terrorist travel including by authorizing the hiring of additional experienced intelligence analysts who are specialists in the field of terrorist travel
- Improves intelligence and information sharing between state, local and federal law enforcement by taking such steps as strengthening intelligence fusion centers and providing local law enforcement with a presence at the National Counter Terrorism Center
- Strengthens public diplomacy and other efforts to reduce the appeal of extremism including beefing up U.S. educational, economic development and other aid programs overseas

## House Passes Energy and Water Bill

The House passed a \$31.6 billion bill this week funding the Energy Department and water infrastructure projected by a 312 to 112 vote.

Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2008 (H.R. 2636)

The bill steers hefty increases to energy efficiency and renewable energy research, for a total of \$3 billion devoted to addressing climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The bill also cuts nuclear weapons research by 6.3 percent over the

## Labor Rights for Public Safety Workers

The House voted 314 to 97 this week to provide state and local public safety employees with basic collective bargaining rights.

The Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act of 2007 (H.R. 980) establishes organized-

fully protect the collective bargaining rights of public safety employees, and two states – North Carolina and Virginia – actually prohibit public safety employees from bargaining collectively.

In the post-9/11 era of protecting

to 112 vote.

Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2008 (H.R. 2641) provides funding for Army Corps of Engineers, Department of the Interior, Department of Energy and a number of independent energy-related agencies including the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board.

The measure represents a bipartisan effort to confront the energy crisis, reduce gasoline prices and become more energy independent.

ing climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The bill also cuts nuclear weapons research by 6.3 percent over the current year while providing a 74 percent increase to secure unaccounted for nuclear materials and to step up other non-proliferation efforts.

The Senate must approve its version of the bill before it can go before a conference committee which would reconcile any differences. The final bill would then have to be approved by both the House and Senate before being sent to the President.

The Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act of 2007 (H.R. 980) establishes organized-labor rights for firefighters, police officers and other public safety officials, including the rights to form and join unions, and to bargain collectively for hours, wages and work conditions.

Currently, about 20 states do not

public safety employees from bargaining collectively.

In the post-9/11 era of protecting America from terrorism, we ask our police officers, firefighters, and other public safety officers to take on even more responsibilities than they had before, the least we can do is ensure that they have basic rights to seek better wages and benefits.



## House Approves Funding for Health, Education and Labor

The House approved a \$608 billion annual appropriations bill funding education, health and labor by a vote of 276 to 140.

This legislation provides funds for three major federal departments and 14 related agencies, including the departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor. The bill provides the resources needed to improve access to health care and education, and makes significant investments in worker development, safety and protection.

The Senate must approve its version of the bill before it can go to a conference committee which would reconcile any differences. The final bill would then have to be approved by both the House and Senate before being sent to the President.

### KEY INVESTMENTS

**Higher Education Access: Pell Grants** - Between 2001 and 2006, the cost of attending a four-year public college increased by \$3,764 or 42 percent; however, the maximum Pell Grant increased by just \$300. This bill increases the maximum Pell award by \$390 to \$4,700, on top of a \$260 increase provided in the 2007 Continuing Appropriations Resolution. Since January 2006, the maximum Pell Grant will have been raised by a total of \$650 over two years, benefiting over 5.5 million low- and middle-income students.

**K-12 Educational Opportunity: No Child Left Behind (NCLB)** - While the 2002 NCLB legislation imposed strong mandates on states and local school districts, the promised funding has fallen far short. This bill provides a \$2 billion, or 8.6%, increase over fiscal year 2007.

**Disabilities Educational: IDEA Part B Grants** - The bill provides a \$509.5 million, or 4.7%, increase over fiscal year 2007. This investment reverses a two-year decline in the federal contribution toward the rising costs of special education for 6.9 million children with disabilities.

**Child Care and Early Childhood Education: Child Care and Head Start** - First, it provides a \$75 million, or 3.6%, increase over fiscal year 2007 for the Child Care Block Grant. Second, the bill increases Head Start by \$75 million, 1.4%, over fiscal year 2007. Finally, it allocates \$5 million for new child care centers at Job Corps sites.

**Medical Research: National Institutes of Health (NIH)** - Between 2003 and 2006, the annual number of new and competing research grants that NIH could support actually dropped to 1,282 research grants – a 12% drop. This bill provides a \$750 million increase for fiscal year 2008. As a result, NIH can support 545 new and competing research grants. The bill also lifts a two-year freeze on the average cost of new research grants; helps train the next generation of researchers; provides \$110.9 million for the landmark National Children's Study; and provides \$300 million for the global AIDS fund.

**Public Health: Pandemic Flu** - In November of 2005, the President requested \$6.7 billion in emergency supplemental funding for the Department of Health and Human Services to protect the public against a potential influenza pandemic that could kill or injure 90 million Americans. Congress provided the first two installments, but failed to fully fund the request, leaving a \$1 billion shortfall. This bill provides \$1.1 billion – belatedly meeting that obligation. The bill also includes \$5 million to create a new fund to compensate any individuals who might be harmed by the H5N1 influenza vaccine.

**Five Initiatives to Address Family Health Care** - Building on the efforts to expand access to health care earlier this year with \$207 million for community health centers, this adds to that initiative in five ways:

- First, it provides another \$200 million, or a 10.1% increase over fiscal year 2007 for community health centers, allowing them to serve an additional 1 million uninsured people.



- Second, the bill provides \$75 million for State Health Access grants, a new initiative to provide states with start-up grants for programs that expand health care coverage to targeted groups.
- Third, the bill includes \$50 million to assist states in providing "high risk insurance pools" that will make health insurance affordable to almost 200,000 people who are medically high risk and unable to obtain health





- Third, the bill includes \$50 million to assist states in providing “high risk insurance pools” that will make health insurance affordable to almost 200,000 people who are medically high risk and unable to obtain health insurance in the commercial market.
- Fourth, the bill provides \$45 million for health insurance counseling to assist 45 million Medicare beneficiaries understand and fully utilize their benefits.

Fifth, the bill provides up to \$20 million in Labor Department funds for state “gap filler” grants to increase the number of trade-impacted workers who are unable to take advantage of the Health Coverage Tax Credit. Studies show that as few as 10 to 12% of eligible workers currently benefit from this tax credit.

**Rural Health** - The bill provides \$307 million for rural health programs, area health education centers and for the National Health Service Corps. This is \$4.9 million, or 1.6%, more than last year. The funds will support more than 1,200 small, at-risk rural hospitals; create health care networks for more than 775,000 rural residents in underserved communities; provide access to emergency defibrillation devices; and support rural health research centers and state rural health offices.

**Low-Income Home Energy Assistance** - Last year, Congress cut \$1 billion from low-income home energy assistance. This bill rejects the President’s plan for further cuts and restores half of the \$1 billion previously cut from LIHEAP. The additional funds in the bill will support critical energy assistance to approximately 1 million more low-income seniors and families than last year.

**Community Services Block Grant** - The bill includes \$660.4 million for the Community Services Block Grant - \$30 million, or 4.8%, more than fiscal year 2007 – to enable states to expand critical services, such as housing, home weatherization, parenting education, adult literacy classes and emergency food assistance.

## SIGNIFICANT CUTS

**Program Consolidations and Eliminations** - The bill eliminates several smaller programs including the Labor Department’s working capital fund, Denali Commission funding in HHS and the Labor Departments, and the Department of Education’s Exchanges with Historic Whaling and Trading Partners, Excellence in Economic Education, and the Underground Railroad Program.

The bill also consolidates programs in order to eliminate duplication, including multiple youth offender programs in the Labor Department; multiple early childhood and charter school programs in the Department of Education, and multiple library services agencies.

**Significant Program Cuts** - The bill includes \$1.1 billion in cuts below the fiscal year 2007 level. The most significant is a \$629 million, or 61.1%, reduction in funding for the Education Department’s Reading First program. The Department of Education documented, in a series of six audits, significant mismanagement of the program, potential violations of federal law and ongoing conflicts of interest, resulting in referrals to the Justice Department for criminal investigations. Instead of investing significant resources into a program that must be reformed and re-authorized, the bill provides a \$1.9 billion increase for the Title I program to support evidence-based reading instruction for low-income students. In addition, the bill rescinds \$335 million from prior-year balances from the Workforce Investment Act.

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## Minimum Wage Rises Next Week

On July 24<sup>th</sup>, American workers will see the first federal minimum wage increase in a decade – the longest increase gap in our history. While our state has already led the way with a higher minimum wage that has strengthened the economic security of North Carolinians, the graduated increase to \$7.25 will eventually benefit 211,000 workers in our state.

Americans who work hard and play by the rules should earn enough to not only provide for their families, but have their own shot at the American dream. Increasing the minimum wage alone won’t end the cycle of poverty in this country, but it is a positive and needed start. Much more must be done.

It is shameful that in America, the richest and most powerful nation on earth, nearly one fifth of all children go to bed hungry at night because their parents, many of whom are working full time at the minimum wage, still can’t make ends meet. These Americans work as hard as anyone else – often harder. It was long past time for a fair increase in the minimum wage.

Over that decade, inflation has all but erased the effect of the last raise – leaving millions of families behind – with the minimum wage reaching its lowest effective level in more than half a century.

Across the country, there are 20 states that will see a rise in their minimum wage next week. The 70 cent raise this July will be followed by two more 70 cent increases—a total of \$2.10 an hour, or \$4,400 a year—in July 2008 and July 2009. Nearly 13 million people will likely benefit from the minimum wage increase as well as more than 6 million children of low-wage workers.

